



An Introduction to the Community Parenting Support Saturation Project

A 3-year Plan to Build A Foundation of Family Resources



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Background

In Spring 2017, a small group of foundations with a shared interest in strengthening family engagement came together to explore strategies that would effectively elevate the way families engage with their children to ultimately improve their child's outcome. Their query was: "Is it possible to significantly and measurably increase the number and percentage of children who successfully arrive at kindergarten fully ready to thrive by more effectively engaging and supporting primary caregivers in their parenting efforts and activities?" From this group and with this query, they created a grant opportunity for the Community Parenting Support Saturation Project to activate this initiative.

In the fall of 2019, driven by more than a half century of successfully engaging with families on countless endeavors, Illinois Action for Children (I AFC) was awarded the grant and named as Lead Agency for the Community Parenting Saturation Project. In December 2020, through a competitive RFP process spearheaded by I AFC, three communities in and around Chicago were chosen to pilot this program in the state of Illinois: Alignment Rockford, SPARK Early Childhood Collaboration based in Aurora, and the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, located in Chicago's North Lawndale community. Throughout the course of the CPSSP, I AFC will

provide a wide range of training and technical assistance to communities including:

- How to use data for project development;
- Engage families locally;
- Conduct a community needs assessment;
- Utilize a racial equity approach;
- Facilitate large groups; and/or
- Refine a mission and a vision for a collaboration.

The primary goal is to demonstrate what a saturated approach to family engagement strategies and interventions at the community level looks like and if this approach truly leads to measurable changes in parenting beliefs and skills and, ultimately, more successfully preparing Black and Brown children for kindergarten. It is I AFC's belief that this work will have a demonstrably positive effect on kindergarten readiness within the pilot communities, and that the created model will be sustainable and also applicable and adaptable to an even wider swath of under-resourced communities around the state of Illinois and beyond.

Society's overall lack of awareness of the underlying challenges of family engagement and community support where outreach is specifically difficult—as it is in communities of color and especially in communities wrought with generational poverty—is the most significant

challenge of this initiative. Building the foundation of early childhood education is universally difficult but can be made more universally equitable and accessible through intentional, community-wide parenting saturation.

This document outlines the roadmap for the Community Parenting Support Saturation Project (CPSSP) and speaks directly to the change we hope to affect through this grant and the foundation it will lay for future developmental work.

In the pages that follow, we highlight the underlying symptoms of inequitable early childhood care and education, the challenges of family engagement surrounding these issues, and what we see as the way forward, through the lens of the Community Parenting Support Saturation Project. We consider this project and its outcomes as a years-long work of critical importance that deserves to be explained and understood to the fullest extent possible.

Approach

Black and Brown families face disproportionate challenges in raising their children. Throughout

American History, families in marginalized communities have struggled to obtain equitable access to resources, and community support that would enable them to build a long-term foundation of success, including preparing their children for kindergarten and beyond. Historically, the most significant challenges in shrinking these gaps have been lack of awareness and unstable and unpredictable lines of communication to ensure families can access the supports available to them. By targeting these shortcomings—specifically within communities of color—a foundation can be built in the three communities chosen for this grant and in other communities across the state.

“Through our focused, targeted saturation strategies, we hope to teach our entire community the key role they play in positively shaping a child’s life.” - Anisha Grimmett, Executive Director of Alignment Rockford

Targeted outreach and engagement strategies will enhance kindergarten readiness for future generations of children, closing racial disparity gaps over time and uplifting communities in the process. This approach is based on our decades of experiences and understanding that collaborations succeed only when they are democratic and inclusive—it is crucial to the work of this project that its contributors reflect their communities.

The CPSSP is approached with this set of underlying beliefs about the challenges facing families and how to proceed in solving them:

- Parents, families and communities want the best for their young children.
- Parenting is challenging.
- Parents, families and communities have a significant impact on their children’s health, emotional and behavioral well-being, education and long-term success.
- The best thing we can do for children is to support their parents to be the best parents they can be.



Recent findings from behavioral and brain science provide important insights into child development. We, as a funding community, are interested in supporting parents, families, and communities to use this new knowledge.

We believe in the importance of community leadership, innovation, continuous improvement, collaboration, and evaluation.

We use the phrase “meeting our families where they’re at” because that is how we approach family saturation—we understand that no one family looks the same as any other, nor is a one-size-fits-all approach to family outreach right for our communities. Meeting families where they’re at is the backbone of our family outreach strategies, specifically as we seek to expand the resources available to families of color.

Family Outreach & Engagement

Through tiered levels of support opportunities and human-centered program design, we will work with the selected communities to determine for themselves how best to reach and engage with their families. For some families, this may be a one-time encounter raising awareness about how parents contribute to their child’s learning. For others, they may have higher-level, more intense

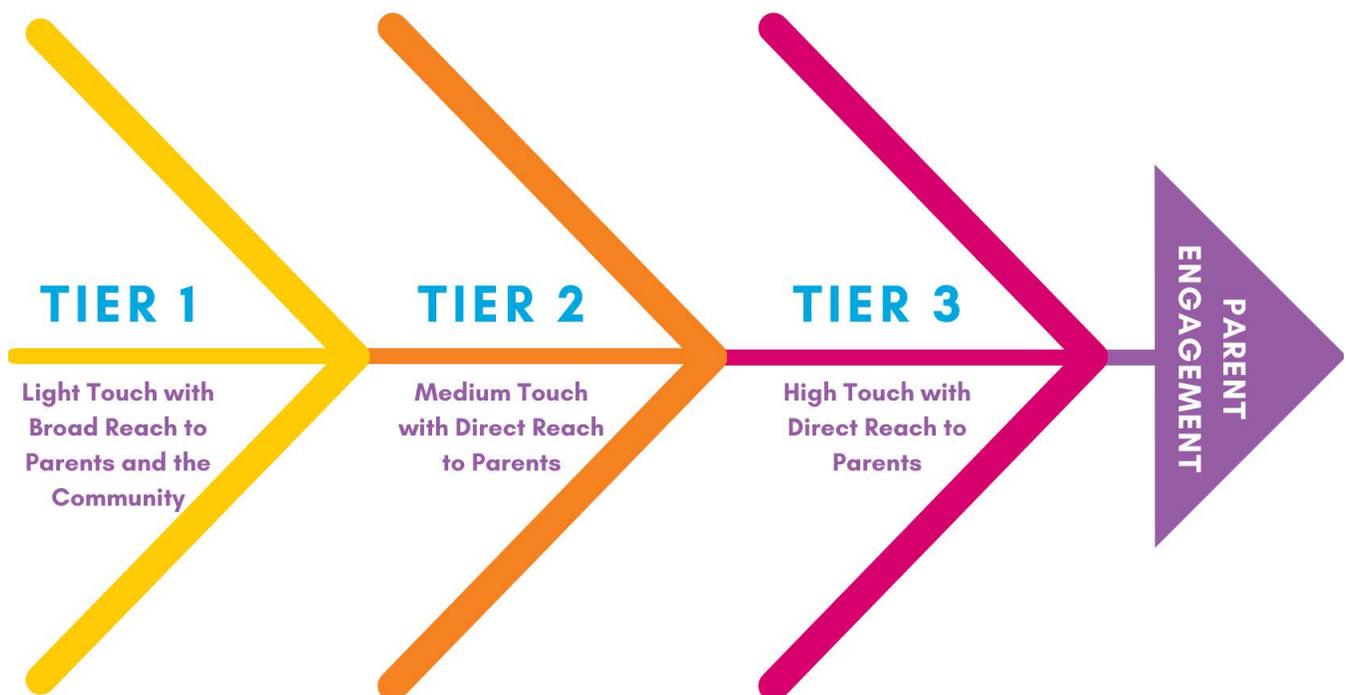
needs requiring a combination of approaches involving both direct and indirect contact.

With this in mind, each community will use several communications approaches, including digital materials, direct and indirect contact, and ongoing opportunities specifically targeting young parents to strengthen their parenting skills to improve outcomes for their children. We know that we will face numerous challenges when it comes to being able to reach parents. By putting community leaders and partners at the forefront of outreach, though, we will be able to build and nurture these relationships between families and communities into long-lasting, multigenerational steps toward improvement.

Tiered Supports

The success of this project will not occur in a bubble. Meeting families where they’re at looks a little different for anyone, especially when considering the challenges of reaching communities of varied race, culture and socioeconomic status. An intentional, multi-pronged approach to family support is required.

When delivered, the specific components of each of the tiers of supports may vary depending upon which community they are being activated



in. However, each tier is defined by the same overriding themes:

Tier 1: Light Touch with Broad Reach to Parents and the Community

Tier 2: Medium Touch with Direct Reach to Parents

Tier 3: High Touch with Direct Reach to Parents

The strategies within each tier are meant to be flexible and implemented based on what each community sees fit in conjunction with the community's shared vision and goals. Some communities may only deem it necessary to pursue one tier of support, while others may choose to utilize all three. As with the overarching strategy of the CPSSP itself, what is most important is to meet the needs of the individual community and its families.

We will work in tandem with communities to implement these interventions, ensuring comprehensive delivery to create meaningful and long-lasting connections for support.

Human-Centered Design

Built with empathy and connection in mind first, a human-centered design approach to training and community engagement will help involve families early and often throughout the life of this project. In building our training process this way, we give

ourselves the opportunity to review and refine the community's proposed strategies and interventions over time, adjusting where necessary to implement training in a way that best serves the local community's needs.

The three components of human-centered design are:

Inspiration: Removing preconceived notions and authentically learning about needs and challenges through conversations and observations.

Ideation: Brainstorming, visualizing, and discussion of all possible solutions.

Implementation: Prototype and build the model.

By using this approach for our community training programs, community-members and stakeholders are put first. It is crucial that we speak to these communities through intentional collateral, whether that be through signs, catchphrases, and/or public imagery. For success and sustainability, communities benefit from having strategies that are refined by family input with an intentional racial equity lens. The chosen communities and their partners have committed to being trained on human-centered design, ensuring successful implementation at the local level. And, as with the rest of this project, we have designed these training programs with innovation and accessibility in mind.



Stronger Families, Stronger Communities

Ultimately, the major goal of the CPSSP is to achieve improved child readiness for kindergarten. Boiling down the potential impacts of this project to only one goal, though, ignores much of the good that will be achieved along the way for children, families, and their communities.

For communities:

- Increased connections and capacity to advance community strategies;
- Improved knowledge and skills in implementing a human-centered design approach with individuals and organizations;
- Elevated collaboration with early learning

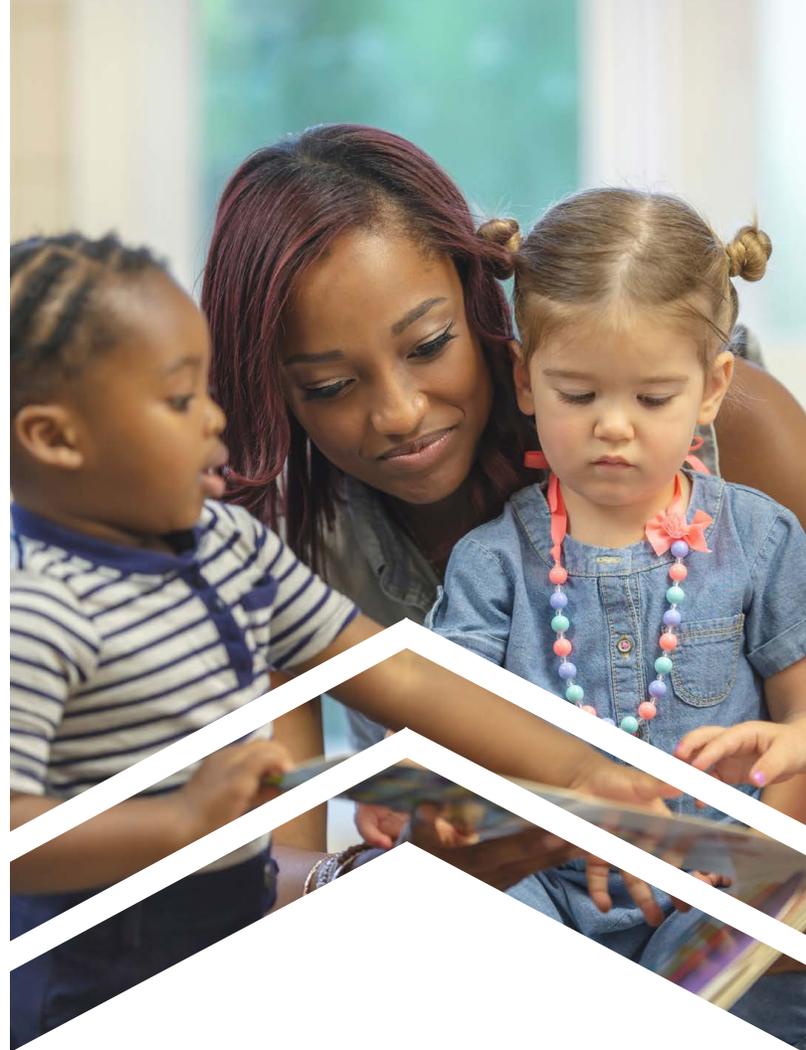
“Aurora has over 20,000 children birth to age 5, and this program builds on our collaboration’s focus of leveraging resources and building capacity to ensure positive outcomes for our families and their young children.” – Trish Rooney, V.P. of Programs at Fox Valley United Way-SPARK Early Childhood Collaboration

providers, parenting-related, and community-based organizations’ services that can support families with young children;

- More champions, including parents of young children, developed to advocate for early learning programs and services; and
- Higher number of community partners, including parents who contribute to saturation activities.

For parents:

- Increased confidence in supporting their children’s growth and learning;
- Advanced participation in parenting or community activities;
- Enhanced social capital through networking and relationship-building;



- Expanded knowledge of the importance of child development and early childhood programs; and
- Increased participation in advocacy activities.

Stronger families mean stronger communities. We’re working to ensure all parents of young children have a comprehensive array of interventions, activities, and supports available to them at every level of need, especially in Black and Brown communities. To reach these goals, an intense investment of time and resources will take place throughout the life of this project. Through policy advocacy and human-centered design, we will address barriers to access and systemic inequality while also delivering sustainable, community-driven services to inform community issues and develop solutions.

As this project begins to take shape in each of these communities, the intended outcomes will become apparent as more families are brought into the work being done—and we will share these findings with you. Parents and families will have

more and more access to the resources they know they need, and those that they didn't know they needed.

Moving Forward

Over the next two years, the communities participating in IAFC's Community Parenting Support Saturation Program will see drastic positive changes in their ability to support and improve kindergarten readiness. Rarely do projects look exactly as imagined by the end of the work. The process of saturating the pilot communities as much an outcome as the interventions and supports provided. The changes brought about by the CPSSP are intended to be long-term, systematic shifts to close racial gaps, put people first, and uplift the families in these communities.

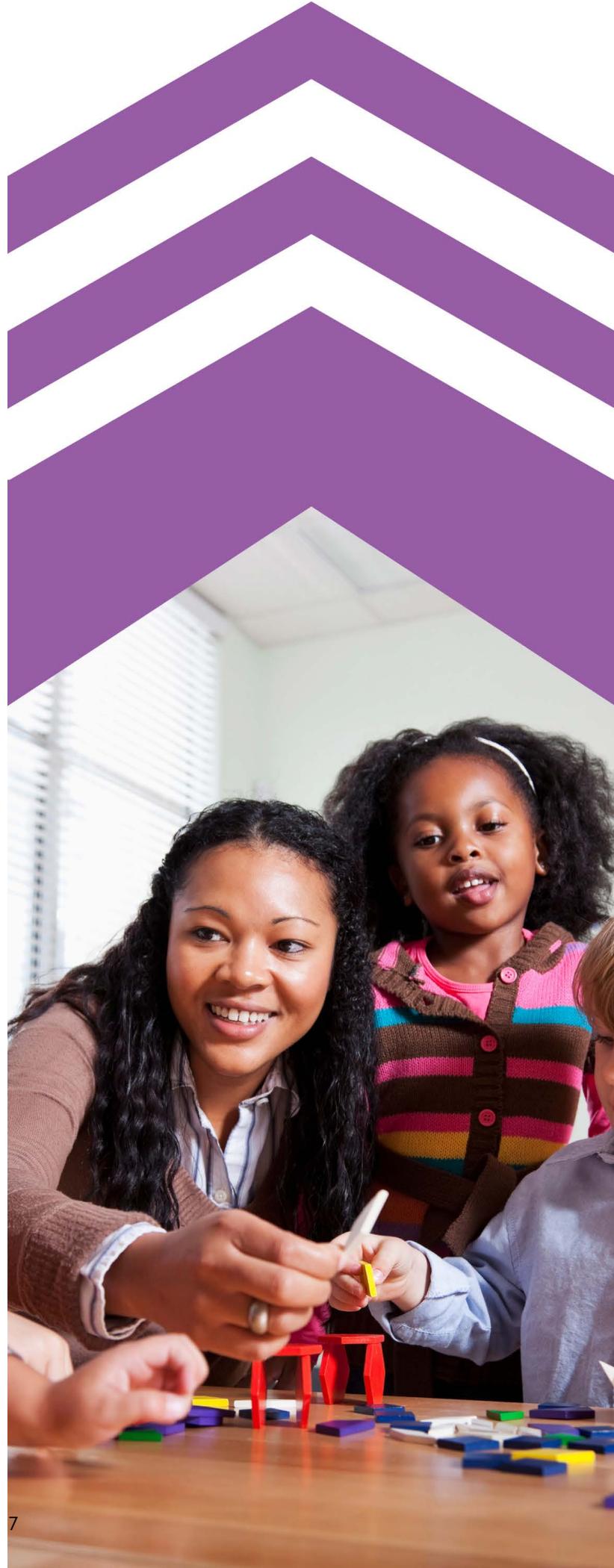
As we know, early childhood is without question the most important period of a child's life. With this saturation approach, we are building a foundation for future success of our children, families, and communities. We're excited to see how the project takes shape in our pilot communities and look forward to sharing the successful results with you.

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[About Illinois Action for Children.](#)





“Illinois Action for Children is a catalyst for organizing, developing and supporting strong families and powerful communities where children matter most.”



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